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(56) Manufacture of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane.

(57) A method for the preparation of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane whereby 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane is contacted with the fluorination catalyst at elevated temperature to effect isomerisation.

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CHEMICAL PROCESS

This invention relates to a chemical process and more particularly to a process for the manufacture of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane.

Several methods have been proposed for the manufacture of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane which is a useful refrigerant, aerosol propellant, blowing agent and solvent. Thus, our United Kingdom Patent No. 1578933 describes a process for making tetrafluoroethanes by hydrogenating dichlorotetrafluoroethanes at elevated temperatures, for example temperatures in the range 200-450 °C. Also, our United Kingdom Patent No. 2004539 describes the manufacture of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane by reacting trifluoroethylene in the vapour phase with hydrogen fluoride in the presence of chromium oxide, suitable reaction temperatures being in the range 200-500 °C. Both of these processes are expensive to operate.

It has now been found that 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane can be prepared in high yield and high selectivity by the isomerisation of 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane under the conditions hereinafter described.

Thus, according to the invention, there is provided a method for the preparation of 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane which comprises contacting 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane with a fluorination catalyst at an elevated temperature whereby to effect isomerisation.

Fluorination catalysts useful in the method of the invention have been fully described in the prior art and include aluminium fluoride, sodium fluoride, gamma-alumina and, especially, chromia. Unmodified chromia may be used but it is advantageous to use a pre-fluorinated chromia that has been used in other fluorination reactions. After use, the catalyst may be regenerated by treatment with air at an elevated temperature, for example 400-420 °C.

The isomerisation temperature should be sufficiently high to effect conversion of the 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane but not so high that excessive amounts of by-products, such as pentafluoroethane, are obtained. In general, suitable temperatures are found in the range from about 300 to about 800 °C. Lower temperatures can generally be employed when using chromia as the fluorination catalyst, for example temperatures from about 300 to about 550 °C, more especially from 350 to 500 °C and preferably from 400 to 450 °C. At these temperatures, the 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane, optionally in conjunction with an inert diluent such as nitrogen, is suitably contacted with the catalyst for times of between about 1 and about 60 seconds.

The 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane use as starting material in the method of the invention may be obtained by known methods, for example by the method described in United Kingdom Patent No. 1578933 or by the hydrogenation of tetrafluoroethylene. The latter reaction may be conveniently effected at normal or elevated temperatures, for example up to 250 °C, in the presence of a hydrogenation catalyst, for example palladium on alumina.

The invention is illustrated but not limited by the following Example.

EXAMPLEHYDROGENATION OF TETRAFLUOROETHYLENE

Hydrogen at 1000 ml/min and tetrafluoroethylene at 100 ml/min were passed over 120 g 5% palladium/alumina at ambient temperature in a glass reactor, the off gases being collected in two traps cooled in trichloroethylene and Drikold. There was an immediate exotherm and the temperature rose to 250 °C. After 210 min, the hydrogen and tetrafluoroethylene flows were turned off and the reactor and lines purged with nitrogen. The material condensed in the traps was weighed and analysed. The product was 84.4 g (94% yield) of 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane (purity 98.5%).

ISOMERISATION OF 1,1,2,2-TETRAFLUOROETHANE

1,1,2,2-Tetrafluoroethane and diluent nitrogen were passed through a Hastelloy reactor tube packed with 80 ml chromia, the reactor being heated in a furnace. After the reactor, the gases were passed through an empty tube to effect cooling and then through a scrubber containing 25% potassium hydroxide solution to remove hydrogen fluoride. The products were finally condensed in a trap cooled in trichloroethylene and Drikold. Gas samples were taken after the scrubber for analysis by gas chromatography.

Details of a number of runs using pre-fluorinated chromia, which had been dried at 400 °C for 4 hours and then "activated" by passage of air at 200-300 ml/min at 400 °C overnight, are given below in Table 1.

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In the Table:

A134 = 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane

A134a = 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane

3FE = trifluoroethylene

A125 = pentafluoroethane

A flow rate of 50 ml/min A134 and 100 ml/min nitrogen corresponds to a catalyst contact time of approximately 12 sec.

Table 2 gives details of runs using the same catalyst after regeneration with 400 ml/min air at 400° C for 18 hours.

TABLE 1

Catalyst Volume ml	Temperature °C	A134 Flowrate ml/min	Nitrogen Flowrate ml/min	Concentration in Off Gas mole %			
				A134	A134a	3FE	A125
80	288	50	100	83.5	1.0	0.1	0.2
80	325	50	100	81.4	3.0	0.1	0.4
80	420	50	100	69.9	21.5	0.2	0.7
80	480	50	100	59.4	34.7	0.3	1.8
80	497	50	100	52.6	34.6	0.2	8.5
80	550	50	100	48.1	28.1	0.3	27.9
80	510	80	100	56.0	26.0	0.6	12.7
80	485	50	100	73.4	21.0	1.0	2.7
80	410	50	100	88.5	9.1	0.8	0.4
80	470	50	100	74.9	18.4	0.2	3.8

TABLE 2

80	420	50	100	29.1	4.2	-	60.2
80	343	50	100	66.9	25.7	0.4	3.7
80	328	50	100	75.5	21.1	-	1.1
80	375	50	100	43.8	48.8	0.1	5.4
80	388	50	200	52.3	43.0	0.2	2.8
80	400	50	300	48.3	48.1	0.1	3.9
80	412	50	400	48.8	44.3	0.1	4.4
80	410	50	250	40.3	50.2	0.9	7.1
80	430	50	300	47.1	43.6	1.6	8.2
80	440	50	400	53.7	36.6	2.2	8.5
80	445	50	100	28.4	52.9	0.5	18.8
80	450	50	150	41.4	45.1	0.7	11.1
80	455	50	100	40.6	42.5	0.6	14.7
80	455	50	100	47.8	42.2	0.8	7.9

Claims

1. A method for the preparation of 1,1,1 2-tetrafluoroethane which comprises contacting 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethane with a fluorination catalyst at an elevated temperature whereby to effect isomerisation.
2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the catalyst comprises chromia.
3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the catalyst comprises pre-fluorinated chromia.

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4. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the temperature is in the range from about 300 to about 900 °C.

5. A method according to claim 4 wherein the temperature is in the range from about 300 to about 550 °C.

6. A method according to claim 5 wherein the temperature is in the range from 350 to 500 °C.

7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the temperature is in the range from 400 to 450 °C.

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